

HOW PODCASTS BECAME THE RADIO OF THE FUTURE: UNDERSTANDING FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE PODCAST CONSUMPTION AMONG MILLENNIALS

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Abstract

Objectives of the study

Content consumption has become an essential part of our daily lives, and over 80% of Europeans are online. Online platforms enabled anyone to reach the masses, and the megaphone effect was born (McQuarrie et al., 2013). One form of the phenomenon are podcasts, media files that can be listened through online sites and mobile applications (e.g. Berry, 2006; Jham et al., 2008). Currently, there are over 700,000 active podcasts with over 29 million episodes (Whitner, Podcast Statistics 2020), yet the phenomenon still lacks research. Content consumption in general has been researched and explained e.g. through Goffman's presentation of self (1978) and Belk's extended self in online environment. Due to the lack of previous research, the objective of this study is to get a wider understanding about the podcast consumption among millennials and explore the most important factors that explain the podcast consumption.

Methodology

This research is qualitative and interpretive, as the aim was to understand the content consumption in the context of podcasts. Eight semi-structures in-depth interviews were conducted in order to gain knowledge about millennials' podcast consumption.

Findings

This study recognized three important factors that explain the podcast consumption among millennials: 1) Millennials are searching for self-improvement, and podcasts combine learning into entertainment in a unique way. 2) Millennials aim to be efficient, and podcasts fulfill this goal by enabling the combination of daily tasks and learning new. 3) The lack of sharing options and other functionalities shape the nature of podcasts and enables the honesty and intimacy of the platform. These key findings affect to the growing popularity of podcasts among millennials.

Keywords content consumption, podcasts, self-improvement, millennials, entertainment, online platforms, social media

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Tutkimuksen tavoite

Verkkosisältöjen kuluttamisesta on tullut tärkeä osa arkipäiväistä elämäämme, ja yli 80% eurooppalaisista käyttää Internetiä. Verkkosisällöt ovat mahdollistaneet sen, että kuka tahansa voi tavoittaa suuren yleisön. Tätä kutsutaan megafoni-ilmiöksi (McQuerrie ym., 2013), joka syntyi Internetin suosion ja sisältöjen kasvun myötä. Yksi ilmiön muoto ovat podcastit, jotka ovat mediatiedostoja, joita voi kuunnella verkossa tai mobiilisovelluksilla esimerkiksi puhelimella tai muilla elektronisilla laitteilla (esim. Berry, 2006; Jham ym., 2008). Tällä hetkellä on olemassa yli 700 000 aktiivista podcastia ja yli 29 miljoonaa podcast-jaksoa (Whitner, Podcast Statistics 2020), mutta ilmiötä ei silti ole juuri tutkittu. Verkkosisältöjen kuluttamista yleisemmin on tutkittu aiemmin esimerkiksi Goffmanin teorian ”Presentation of Self” (1978) kautta sekä Belkin ”Extended Self in Online Environment” –teorian avulla. Koska podcasteja ei aiemmin ole juurikaan tutkittu, tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on ymmärtää podcastien kulutusta milleniaalien keskuudessa ja löytää tärkeimmät podcastien kuluttamiseen vaikuttavat tekijät.

Metodologia

Tutkimus on kvalitatiivinen ja selittävä, koska tavoitteena oli ymmärtää verkkosisältöjen kuluttamista podcastien kontekstissa. Jotta saatiin riittävästi tietoa milleniaalien podcastien kuuntelemisesta, kahdeksan puolistrukturoitua haastattelua järjestettiin kohderyhmän edustajille.

Löydöt

Tutkimuksesta kävi ilmi kolme tärkeää tekijää, jotka vaikuttavat podcastien kuluttamiseen milleniaalien kohderyhmässä: 1) Milleniaalit haluavat kehittää itseään, ja podcastit yhdistävät uuden oppimisen viihteeseen ainutlaatuisella tavalla. 2) Milleniaalit pyrkivät tehokkaaseen ajankäyttöön, ja podcastit täyttävät tavoitteen mahdollistamalla esimerkiksi päivittäisten askareiden yhdistämisen uuden oppimiseen. 3) Podcastien käyttöominaisuudet, esimerkiksi jakamismahdollisuuksien puute ylläpitää podcastien luonnetta intiiminä ja rehellisenä sisältöalustana. Erityisesti nämä kolme tekijää ovat vaikuttaneet podcastien jatkuvasti kasvavaan suosioon milleniaalien keskuudessa.

Avainsanat podcastit, sisällöt, milleniaalit, sosiaalinen media, sisältöjen kuluttaminen

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1 Introduction

Consuming content online has become part of our daily lives, and it would be difficult to imagine the world without online platforms. Over 80% of people in Europe are online (Airoidi, 2018) and the time we spend online is just increasing. The shift towards traditional medias changing into online content backs up from the born of Web 2.0 and user-generated-content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Consumers started to get the power of reaching the masses through online platforms, and the megaphone effect speeded up the spread of the phenomenon (McQuarrie et al., 2013). The effect means that anyone has a chance to reach the masses through digital channels (McQuarrie et al., 2013).

Megaphone effect enabled anyone to start producing content that can get the attention of the crowds. This effect affected to the born of influencers and the generalization of online content consumption in different medias. Even though different social medias, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, reached the big masses first, podcasts started to slowly become popular after Apple's iTunes made them available in 2005. Podcast is a media file that consumers can reach through an online media site (e.g. Berry, 2006; Jham et al., 2008). Podcasts are usually listened via apps or online platforms, such as Spotify, Sound Cloud, Podcast Addict, Supla, Yle Areena or Cast Box. Currently, there are over 700,000 active podcasts with over 29 million episodes in more than 100 languages (Whitner, Podcast Statistics 2020).

Over 42% of millennials listen to podcasts at least once a week (Arnold, 2017). Despite the growing popularity of podcasts among millennials and other consumers, they have not been researched widely yet. Podcasts have been previously used and researched in learning environment (e.g. Cebeci & Tekdal, 2006; Heilesen, 2010; Kay, 2012; Richardson, 2016), yet the consumption of

podcasts lacks the research outside the schools and organizations. Thus, this thesis will be focusing on searching the main factors that explain the podcast consuming among millennials. The chosen target group was millennials, as podcasts are being listened the most among 25-34 years old consumers, millennials (Whitner, Podcast Statistics 2020). Millennials spend over 2,5 hours in different online medias daily (Global Web Index, 2019), and they have generally a positive attitude towards new technology, which makes them an important and big group of online content consumers.

Despite the lack of research in the context of podcasts, online content consumption in general has been researched before. Thus, I use previous theories regarding consumers' behavior in online environment to evaluate the podcast consumption habits and see whether the findings differentiate from other online medias.

Goffman (1978) presented the concept of presentation of self, that is still current and visible in online environment. Belk (2013) extends the theory to online content consumption through five characteristics that are typical for extended self in the digital environment. Extended self is among the factors that explain the way consumers consume content online. Kietzmann et al. (2011) define consumers' content consumption through seven functional blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. Some of the blocks are more visible in other online platforms than others.

According to McNay's analysis (2009) based on Foucault's "The Birth of Biopolitics", individuals consider themselves as enterprises, which drives them to focus on self-improvement. Podcasts have been used in different learning environments rather widely, and the results on educational outcomes have been contradictory (e.g. Cebeci & Tekdal, 2006; Heilesen, 2010; Kay, 2012; Richardson, 2016). Despite the contradictory results, students' attitudes

towards podcasts as a learning method have been mainly positive (e.g. Heilesen, 2010; Kay, 2012). The clear connection between the seek for self-improvement and the positive attitudes towards podcasts as a learning method in schools is interesting and offers an intriguing angle to investigate the topic further.

To get a wider understanding of millennials' podcast consumption, I conducted a qualitative study. An interpretive approach was used, as the aim was to understand the phenomenon of millennials' online content consumption in the context of podcasts. To gain knowledge about millennials' experiences and habits of consuming podcasts, I conducted eight semi-structured in-depth interviews.

1.1 Research objectives and question

There are two goals regarding this research. Firstly, I aim to contribute the existing literature regarding content consumption in general and the research that has been already conducted in the context of podcasts. As the existing literature regarding podcasts is very limited, the second objective is to get a better understanding of the podcast consumption among millennials. The aim is to find the most important factors that explain the growing popularity of podcasts among the chosen target group, millennials.

In order to get a wider and deeper understanding about the podcast consumption among millennials, the research question was formed:

What are the building blocks of sustained podcast consumption among millennials?

1.2 Structure of the thesis

The research consists of five chapters. The first part introduces the topic and the research question. The second chapter presents an overview on already existing literature regarding online content consumption in general, podcasts and theories that can be used to evaluate the podcast content consumption. The third chapter goes through the research methodology: research approach, data collection and analysis will be included. The fourth section introduces the findings of the study. The final chapter links everything together by presenting the implications of the study and proposing topics for future research. Limitations will also be evaluated.

2 Literature review

In this chapter, I will present theoretical discussion around content consumption in online media. As the consumption of podcasts is not yet widely researched, the theoretical background will mainly consist of theories regarding content consumption in digital environment. Kietzmann et al. (2011) presented the functional blocks of social media, that define the characteristics of online platforms. Belk (2013) defines online content consumption through five characteristics that are typical for extended self in the digital environment. This theory extends Goffman's concept of the presentation of self, and is defining consumers' behavior online. Literature review will also consist theories regarding self-improvement and entertainment. McNay's analysis (2009) on individuals considering themselves as enterprises will be presented, as it explains consumers' search for self-improvement.

2.1 The emergence of content consumption in online media

Online content can be consumed via social media, email, search engines, online games, YouTube, Spotify, Netflix and other online media sites. Content in online media refers to pictures, videos, audible sounds, text and other forms of media online. Consuming the content has become part of our daily lives, as they can be accessed through computers and smartphones. In 2017, more than half of the population was online, while in North America and Europe this number is over 80% (Airoldi, 2018) and the number has continued increasing.

Consuming content online backs up from the born of Web 2.0 and user-generated-content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These terms are related to the change of the Internet towards how we know it nowadays: a platform where content is created and edited constantly by all users. World Wide Web 2.0 refers

to the functionalities that enabled the shift towards the new communal way of using Internet. User-generated-content (UGC) refers to all different forms of content that are open for all and created by the end-users themselves (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), such as videos, pictures or text. Web 2.0 changed the access to attention rapidly and enabled individuals to produce and distribute information and content in a way that was not possible before (e.g. DiMaggio et al., 2004; McQuarrie et al., 2013). Shao (2009) argues that two attributes regarding the usability, “easy to use” and “let users control”, enable people to participate in the content creation.

Due to the shift to Web 2.0 and user-generated-content, the power was shift from individuals to all users (e.g. Kietzmann et al., 2011; McQuarrie et al., 2013). The new online media platforms allowed everyone to participate through posting their own content and reach the masses in a completely new way (McQuarrie et al., 2013). This offered a whole new communicative ecosystem taking along everyone and changing the role of the traditional media, as they had lost the monopoly of sharing information (Meraz, 2009). Vice versa, independent citizens can now become for example important political influencers, while this role used to belong to journalists and the politicians themselves.

Through the shift to the user-generated-content, the online content consumption itself started to become popular. As it is impossible to consume content without others creating it, the creation process is tightly linked to the online content consumption. The access to what can be consumed defines the consumption (Belk, 2014). Thus, content creators decide what kind of content exists and can be consumed. The consumers however then decide what kind of content becomes popular by choosing to consume certain kind of content. As the consumption started to shift to online medias and user-generated-content, traditional medias have lost their popularity to some extent.

In addition to the technological change that enabled the boom of online medias, the change has happened also in people's minds. As the technological products have become inescapable, consumers are cognizant of the paradoxes, resulting into different behavioral coping strategies (Mick & Fournier 1998). Technological paradoxes have triggered negative emotions in people, which has lead into finding the coping strategies moderated by situation, product and personal factors (Mick & Fournier 1998). These coping strategies are also used in online medias and content consumption. As some kind of content in certain online medias may affect negative emotions, coping strategies are used. Coping strategies change over time, especially as the online medias are still constantly getting new shapes. As the use of online medias has become inevitable thanks to the technological shift, the coping strategies have changed and consumers have found new ways to utilize online platforms and social media in their daily lives.

The first generation that grow up with the Internet is millennials (Sindik & Graybeal, 2011). A common definition is that millennials are born after year 1980, usually between 1981 and 1999 (e.g. Borges et al., 2010; Sindik & Graybeal, 2011). Technology became part of their daily lives naturally, and nowadays millennials are often called diginatives (Kilian et al., 2012). Millennials are said to be community-focused and problem solvers (Borges et al., 2010), yet other studies show that they are not as homogenous group as has been previously thought (Kilian et al., 2012). To millennials, the importance of social media is very high, yet they still use the traditional medias as well. Millennials are more active to integrate different new technologies into their daily lives than generation X or boomers (Moore, 2018). The increasing popularity of different digital medias among millennials makes them an interesting target group for podcasts as well. Recent studies show, that 42% of millennials listen to podcasts at least once a week (Arnold, 2017). As millennials

are approving for all kind of online medias, also the popularity of podcasts keeps on growing among the target group.

2.2 Definition of social media

Among the most common platforms to consume content online are different social media platforms. Social media refers to websites, applications and other forms of electronic communication that allow consumers and companies to consume, produce and share content online. Content can be for example pictures, videos, information, news and textual or audible messages. Other users can engage with the content through sharing, reacting and commenting. Social media and other online platforms, such as podcasts, allow any consumer to both produce and consume content in a way that was not possible before (McQuarrie et al., 2013). There are different types of social media platforms targeted for different means. The most common social media platforms in Europe are e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Tinder, YouTube, Spotify and TikTok. For example, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and Facebook are entertaining platforms, whereas LinkedIn is targeted for business-oriented networking and Twitter for provoking conversations.

2.2.1 Functional blocks of social media

According to Kietzmann et al. (2011), there are seven functional blocks regarding social media, that affect to consuming content online: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. Not all seven are necessarily present on all social media platforms, as different channels construct of different functionalities. The identity refers to the information users reveal in the social media platform's settings (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Most platforms can be used with both consumer's real name or a nickname (e.g. Instagram, Twitter and Facebook) and building the social media

identity can happen through either of them. Social media identity enables self-branding and can, often indirectly, affect users' self-esteem (Chen & Lee, 2013). It can have both negative and positive impacts on consumers' mental wellbeing through the different functionalities of social media (Best et al., 2014).

Many online media platforms are designed to encourage the communication between users, such as Twitter and Facebook (Viswanath et al., 2009). Communication can also happen through visual way, such as videos on TikTok or pictures on Instagram. Social media interactions affect consumers' brand choices as others' opinions are seen relatable (Liu & Lopez, 2016). This urges consumers to communicate about brands on social media, as they know their opinions matter. This shapes the consumption of online medias, as consumers want to both get information and be part of providing it to others. Different social media platforms encourage for different type of conversations, for example Tinder for romantic communication and LinkedIn for professional interaction. The way consumers interact on social media can also change, if they use the platform for a long time (Viswanath et al., 2009).

The other important factor regarding the use of social media is sharing. Sharing refers the act of distributing, receiving or exchanging content between social media users (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Most social media channels allow content sharing, and even encourage into it, e.g. Twitter and Facebook (Viswanath et al., 2009). As different interactions on social media can indirectly affect on consumers' mental health (Best et al., 2014), sharing content online is also part of the phenomenon. It can be part of perceived social support, if other social media users share consumer's content. Social support, increased self-esteem and social capital are reasons for using certain online platforms (Best et al., 2014), which makes sharing an important factor for the use of social media as well.

Social media presence is important in order to get the most out of online media platforms: to communicate with others, learn new things and build personal brand (Soumitra, 2010). According to Kietzmann et al. (2011), presence refers to the availability on social media and user's possibility to track others' availability. Many platforms allow users to tag their location and reveal when users are online or offline. The more the users are online and use the social media, the bigger the influence regarding other users (e.g. Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Soumitra, 2010). Goffman (1978) presented the concept of self-presentation that links to the presence on social media even nowadays. Self-presentation represents people's aim to control how others see them (Goffman, 1978). People aim to control what others think about them through their social media presence: which channels they use, how often they are available, how often and what they post et cetera.

Presence is linked to the next functionality on social media, relationships. Relationships mean the relations between two or more users on social media (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Social media relationships are important, as the dramatically increased use of online platforms has lead into a situation where using Internet is the new norm and communicating through digital platforms is counted as "real" (Airoldi, 2018). Consumers can engage in various ways, e.g. through sharing content or having conversations, and thus are connected to each other (Viswanath et al., 2009). Usually, consumers have multiple relationships on social media and belong to several networks, as they often have e.g. professional networks on LinkedIn and more personal relationships on for example Instagram or Facebook (Airoldi, 2018). Brands can also utilize the creation of relationships on social media, as they can aim to create a strong relationship between the brand and consumers, which can result into higher brand relationship quality (e.g. Dijkmans et al., 2015; Hudson et al., 2016). Thus, relationships are wider than just between the consumers, they rather include all social media participants despite their role.

When consumers are active on social media, a certain kind of social media reputation is formed. Social media reputation is created based on how users associate others on social media (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The reputation can be shown through engagements, such as reactions on Facebook, endorsements on LinkedIn, likes on YouTube and Instagram or retweets on Twitter (Viswanath et al., 2009). Social media users can both earn reputation themselves and have an impact on other users' reputation. The reputation is also linked to Goffman's theory of self-representation, as the desire to control others' image of yourself is strong on social media. Users aim to get more likes through using hashtags, tagging locations and participating in challenges or campaigns that gain a lot of visibility. By posting about certain topics, consumers aim to express themselves in a way they want to be seen (Schau, 2003). Reputation is also linked to firms' presence on social media, as a good reputation can be a key driver for companies to have a strong social media presence (e.g. Kietzmann et al., 2011; Dijkmans et al., 2015; Hudson et al., 2016). Social media engagements are positively related to companies' reputation, which makes the use of social media a potentially effective way to build reputation, especially among non-customers (Dijkmans et al., 2015).

According to Kietzmann et al. (2011), the last functional social media block is groups. It refers to the communities and sub-communities formed on social media platforms. The groups are formed in different ways on different platforms and forming a community usually requires that the consumers share a common interest (Kozinets et al., 2008). For example, Facebook allows to create both open and closed groups, on LinkedIn it is possible to form professional networking groups and Instagram users have started to create private accounts that can be used in the same way as closed groups on Facebook. In all the platforms, groups are formed based on common interests. Online communities play a role in forming social media identities, yet it is argued that it can also

result into self-isolation as the community begins to replace real face-to-face interactions (DiMaggio et al., 2001). Online communities can also be utilized by brands, for example when creating and testing new products (Kozinets et al., 2008).

2.2.2 Definition of blogs

Blogs are an electric way of producing and distributing content through pictures and written texts. There are numerous platforms offering a possibility to share and consume blog texts, such as Blogspot, Medium, Tumblr and WordPress. In 2000s, blogs became the most popular social media sites and networking tools (e.g. Thevenot, 2007; McQuarrie et al., 2013). Consumers started to use blogs as a new way to express themselves and do self-branding in order to become an influencer (Khamis & Welling, 2016). Many popular influencers nowadays have started their career as bloggers, such as Finnish influencers Linda Juhola, Alexa Dagmar and Aino Rossi. They became well-known by sharing interesting content through their blogs. Thus, they created self-brands they have been able to utilize later in other online media platforms as well, such as podcasts and vlogs on YouTube.

The importance of traditional media has decreased due to the blogging phenomenon (e.g. Meraz, 2009; McQuarrie et al., 2013). As consumers started to consume content on blogs, traditional media outlets turned into an option instead of the primary news or entertainment source (Meraz, 2009). This is called megaphone effect, as Internet enabled normal consumers to reach the mass audiences (McQuarrie et al., 2013). Influencer phenomenon is not limited to just fashion bloggers, but rather includes influencers in all fields, such as food, culture, home décor, games, sports, politics and travelling (McQuarrie et al., 2013). Thus, all kind of content can be consumed in online medias, thanks to influencers and other content creators. As the consumption of blogs and vlogs

became popular, consumers started to prefer online content over e.g. books, traditional TV and books. Later on, podcasts came to challenge traditional radio and other audio medias.

Interaction is an important part of blogging, as commenting, sharing and interacting with followers play a crucial role in order to become a professional blogger. Thanks to the interaction, blogs nowadays have a bigger impact on purchase intentions and brand attitudes than for example traditional online magazines (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). The interaction is a big factor encouraging to the consumption of blogs and vlogs as well, as it is something that traditional medias do not offer in the same way. However, blogging may also have negative influence (Thevenot, 2007), as young and sensitive consumers can be negatively affected thanks to influencers. Certain kind of content may cause pressure, stress or other negative feelings in consumers' minds. This triggers coping strategies, as was mentioned before.

2.2.3 Definition of vlogs

Vlogs are blogs in a video format, produced by consumers and shared for example on YouTube. Vloggers, consumers creating the vlogs, produce content regarding different subjects in video-format. Vlogs offer anyone an opportunity to utilize the megaphone effect, as anyone can start producing vlogs and upload them on YouTube (McQuarrie et al., 2013). Vlogging is dynamic and interactive, and requires an online-community (Wood, 2019). Vlogs can be seen as online video monologues and vloggers interact with future audience that is not present at the moment when they film the videos (Frobenius, 2014). Even though the audience is not present during the filming, vloggers actively participate in the interaction with their viewers (Frobenius, 2014).

Consumers watching vlogs often engage with the vloggers through commenting their vlogs. Khan (2017) found out that anonymity motivates viewers to interact with the vloggers. Comments are experienced as an entertainment and a way to seek information (Khan, 2017). The actual interaction in the vlog culture happens through the comments: a viewer leaves a comment and the influencer or other consumers reply to the comment, and thus discussion begins. The interaction may happen on the vlog platform, such as YouTube, or in other social media channels, such as Instagram or TikTok. The online communities that are formed through vlogs and blogs can make the consumers feel that the online communication fulfills their social-interaction needs (Shao, 2009). As the online communities and interaction are important for both the content producers and its consumers, it plays a key role in blog and vlog culture.

The emerge of blogs and vlogs has had an impact on the birth of podcasts, as the influencers found an additional platform to express themselves and create self-branding. Podcasts can be seen as part of McQuerrie's theory of the megaphone effect, as everyone has an equal opportunity to start publishing podcasts.

2.3 Definition of podcast

Podcasting is an audio-digital way to produce content. The end product of the process is podcast, a media file that is downloaded to online media site (e.g. Berry, 2006; Jham et al., 2008). Podcasts are usually listened via Spotify, Sound Cloud, Podcast Addict, Supla, Yle Areena, Cast Box or other similar apps or online platforms. They can be listened whenever and wherever the consumers wish to, and thus podcasts have removed international barriers when it comes to audio content (e.g. Berry, 2006; Jham et al., 2008). Podcasts present certain topics usually in a casual or relaxed manner with one or more talkers. The topics of podcasts vary widely and podcasts can either be focusing on certain topics, such as investing, relationships or books, or each episode can be related to a

different theme. Podcasts can include visitor talkers, for example specialists of the episode's theme. Hosts of the podcasts can be celebrities, radio hosts, experts, influencers or people with no earlier experience on producing content.

Currently, there are over 700,000 active podcasts with over 29 million episodes in over 100 languages (Whitner, Podcast Statistics 2020). The number of podcast listeners has increased year by year in the 2010s. In 2019, the number of podcast listeners was over 88 million just in the United States (Watson, Statista, 2019). Podcasts are being listened the most among 25-34 years old consumers, as 28% of US millennials listen to podcasts (Whitner, Podcast Statistics 2020). Podcasts are mostly listened via smartphones, as the biggest media companies noticed the increased popularity of podcasts and entered the marketplace (Adgate, Forbes, 2019). Spotify, Apple and Sony Music are among the biggest operators in the podcast industry and have popular apps or other features enabling podcasts to be easily listened. The first publisher of podcasts was Apple by developing the technology to suit its iTunes and iPods (Sterne et al., 2008).

Before podcasts reached the masses, the phenomenon was doubted to be bypassing (Dearman & Galloway 2005). Podcasts were even called “pirate radio for masses” and it was evaluated that big organization need to jump into the phenomenon before it can ever become a stable new media (Dearman & Galloway 2005). Podcasting is also stated as a revolution, as it offers any consumer an opportunity to get his or her voice heard (Berry, 2006). Apple's iTunes began carrying podcasts in 2005 (Neumayr, Apple press release, 2005), yet the podcasting phenomenon started becoming mainstream slowly after that (Adgate, Forbes, 2019).

The first podcaster is said to be Dave Winer, a software developer who developed a simple way to record and publish his program called Morning Café Notes (Bhaskar, 2018). Winer started his program before it was possible to publish

podcasts on iTunes, yet Apple has been playing a big role in starting the podcasting phenomenon as they were the first allowing the masses to reach podcasts easily (e.g. Dearman & Galloway 2005; Berry, 2006; Sterne et al., 2008). Apple invented a way to combine RSS and iPod's technology in order to make podcasts available for all iPod owners (Sterne et al., 2008). The popularity started to increase slowly after podcasts became easily accessible (Sterne et al., 2008). The biggest popularity came after the other online medias, such as social media channels and blogs, became extremely popular. Megaphone effect explain the rise of those new online medias, as they enabled anyone to get grab the so-called online megaphone and get heard by the mass audience (McQuarrie et al., 2013). Podcasts are another way to utilize the megaphone effect, as any consumer can start a podcast and become popular.

2.4 Extended self in online media

As the literature shows, podcasting started to spread when it became easily available and consumers started to have an access to different kind of podcasts (e.g. Dearman & Galloway 2005; Berry, 2006; Sterne et al., 2008). The megaphone effect was found by consumers and the benefits of reaching the masses were started to utilize (McQuarrie et al., 2013). As podcast consumption has not been researched widely yet, and the popularity started to rise after other online medias became part of our daily lives, it can be assumed that same consumers use both other online platforms and listen to podcasts. Thus, we will evaluate the consumption of podcasts through the frameworks explaining the use of online platforms in general. Online content consumption can be defined through extended self in digital environment. Belk explains that the extended self refers to the ways we act, own, communicate and everything we feel attached. All the categories refer to the extended self that expands our core self. Extended self is a major factor affecting our behavior, which makes it a key

explanatory attribute also for consumers' behavior in online media. It can be used to explain the characteristics of online content consumption.

Belk (2013) defines online content consumption through five characteristics that are typical for extended self in the digital environment: dematerialization, reembodiment, sharing, co-construction of self and distributed memory. The findings of this research will be compared with these characteristics to see if the characteristics of podcast consumption match with other online medias.

Dematerialization refers to the disappeared demand of owning physical items in order to consume desired content (Belk, 2013). Consumers no longer need CDs to listen to music or books to read, instead they listen to music online from Spotify and open blogs or online forums to read about a certain topic. Goffman's theory (1978) about presentation of self can be adapted to the online consumption habits: instead of bringing a certain CD to a party, consumers share a suitable playlist on Spotify in order to present themselves in a desired light. Dematerialization defines podcasts as well, as listening to podcasts do not require any special equipment, despite your mobile phone or other device consumers most likely already own (Sterne et al., 2008).

Belk states that reembodiment is another typical characteristic for online content consumption. Consumers do not necessarily know who are the producers of the content and who do they engage with. The same applies to the consumers themselves, as they cannot be identified unless they wish to. To some consumers, avatars play an important role, as they tend to identify themselves with their online Avatar, a picture they choose to use (Bryant & Akerman, 2014). Avatars are common especially in online games, social media and other virtual worlds. When it comes to podcasting, there are no Avatars. Consumers stay anonyms, as no one can see who is listening to what. The producers of the podcasts can decide whether they wish to stay anonym or reveal who they are.

According to Belk, sharing is the third characteristic defining the extended self and our behavior in online media. Sharing itself is not a new phenomenon, yet the online media sites has made it quicker and easier than ever before. Schau (2003) describes consumers' intentions on creating personal web sites in order to present themselves in a desired way. McQuerrie's theory of the megaphone effect supports this approach. Sharing content in online media refers to the same phenomenon, as it is a way to communicate about oneself. The type of content, amount and pace of sharing reveal things about the consumer and others make conclusions about the consumer regarding the shared content. On the other hand, consumers do not have the control over who is sharing and what (Belk, 2013). Thus, consumers can no longer be completely sure whether something is private or not in online media.

Co-construction of self is another defining factor of our behavior regarding online content consumption. We use certain online medias, post photos and share content to construct our extended self (Belk, 2013). Online media sites are the key venues for building our extended self nowadays. Belk completes the traditional theory by the aspect of affirmation seeking: in order to seek acceptance, consumers behave in a certain way, for example follow and engage with their friends' content and post things they wish their friends like or comment back to. It has not been researched whether the extended self applies to the consumption of podcasts.

According to Belk's theory, the last defining characteristic of the extended self in digital environment is distributed memory. As we used to remember things through physical objects, such as books or souvenirs, we associate the same phenomenon into online media nowadays. For example, we listen to a specific playlist on Spotify when we want to reminisce a certain moment or scroll

through a social media site to see what happened in a particular date. This is called online memory (Belk, 2013).

These characteristics define our digital self and have a major impact on how we behave in online media. As online media includes a wide variety of different kind of platforms, some characteristics are emphasized on certain type of online medias, such as social media platforms.

2.5 Content consumption in online media

The consumption of online medias has increased rather recently, since 2003 (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). The rise of consuming content online has been quick, as the social media platforms have reached the masses. Shao (2009) defined different purposes to participate in online medias: users wish to fulfill their information, entertainment and mood management needs. Consumers participate to the interaction with content and other users in order to improve their networks and virtual communities (Shao, 2009). Consumers begin to produce content to express themselves in various ways.

Information and entertainment seeking can be seen as merely the same nowadays, as consumers often consider reading news or searching other information as a way to entertain themselves (Ruggiero, 2009). Information can be consumed through e.g. blogs, vlogs, news sites and social media, and the same platforms are used to consume entertaining content. People tend to seek information to increase their knowledge and awareness of the surrounding world, other people and themselves (Shao, 2009). Entertaining content is consumed due to various reasons, such as relaxing, enjoying esthetic content, escaping challenges in life or seeking sexual arousal (Katz et al., 1973). According to Shao (2009), seeking entertaining content for example from YouTube can be seen as mood management. Consumers can search for suitable

content to match their mood or aim. If consumers feel sad, they can search for happy videos to get into better mood. Thus, online media platforms are a way to support consumers' current feelings or switch them into another mood.

Online media platforms are also used in order to influence others. Social influence among the users gets larger with higher social presence (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In case influencing others motivates consumer to use certain online media platforms, this encourages consumer to be more active. Influencing others as a reason to consume online media is linked to Goffman's (1978) theory of self-presentation. He presented the idea of people aiming to control how others see themselves. Schau & Gilly (2003) strengthen this theory in the social media framework, as they found out that consuming social media is related to self-defining and self-expressive behavior. DiMaggio et al. (2001) also agree that the use of Internet has adapted into those existing patterns. Consumers aim to express themselves through online media and the self-presentation affects to all the steps consumers take in online media sites (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Consumers choose to post about certain topics, like certain posts and follow certain people to express themselves in a desired way. Even the selection of which online media platforms to use is a way of self-presentation, as for example Tinder and LinkedIn offer completely different scope of users to communicate with: Tinder is a dating app, whereas LinkedIn is a platform enabling to form professional networks. It has not been researched whether these theories apply to the consumption of podcasts. Yet, as the consumers are most likely to consume both podcasts and other online medias, these theories will be compared when evaluating the results of this research.

2.6 Self-improvement and entertainment in content consumption

According to McNay's analysis (2009) based on Foucault's "The Birth of Biopolitics", individuals consider themselves as enterprises, which drives them to focus on self-improvement. In the society and work life, individuals are not treated as regular workers but rather as entrepreneurs, which has affected the shift towards the way of thinking oneself as an enterprise. The mindset can be linked to the content consumption in online environment, as Foucault and McNay agree that the mindset applies into everyday life and motivates into certain choices. As online content consumption has become a common way spend time in our daily life, it is likely that the theory applies also to the way we consume content. The rather common use of podcasts in teaching supports the presumption, as students have mainly positive attitude towards podcasts as a learning method (Heilesen, 2010). Belk's theory of extended self in online environment explains our behavior in different online platforms, yet it does not explicate the motives behind beginning to use online medias in the first place. Thus, Foucault's and McNay's analysis of individuals considering themselves as enterprises can be an explanatory factor behind people's desires to consume podcasts.

Another reason behind the popularity of content consumption and self-improvement in online medias is entertainment. In the past years, entertainment has gone through a paradigmatic shift, as the purely hedonistic approach of entertainment has extended with a second dimension that incorporates such things as the search for meaning and natural need satisfaction (Vorderer & Reinecke 2015). This is linked to the self-improvement, as it is another element of entertainment: consumers consider improving themselves as an entertainment. As the amount of online content is unlimited, consumers have high standards on what kind of content they consume (El-Nasr

et al., 2011). Consumers expect that content fulfills certain standards and engage them at a deep emotional level (El-Nasr et al., 2011). Consumers, especially millennials, are searching for a meaning rather than just good feeling or pleasure, when consuming online content (Vorderer & Reinecke 2015). When it comes to podcasts, the same theory is likely to apply. As the amount and variety of different kind of podcasts is already huge, not all podcasts fulfill consumers' needs and desires to find deeper meanings. However, the same challenge applies into all online medias. Thus, content consumption in online medias require that consumers recognize their content needs and find the channels and suitable content in order to fulfill their needs.

2.7 Podcasts in learning environment

Before, podcasts were almost merely used for learning purposes (e.g. Cebeci & Tekdal, 2006; Heilesen, 2010; Kay, 2012; Richardson, 2016). In the learning environment, researches show rather contradictory results on whether podcasts have strong or weak impacts on the educational results. McKinney et al. (2009) showed that students who listened to podcasts and took notes succeeded better than students trying to learn the same things using just PowerPoint slides. Heilesen (2010) researched that the direct impact on academic results was weak, but students' attitudes towards podcasts as a learning method are mainly positive. Some researchers have been exploring whether podcasts could even replace normal lectures. O'Bannon et al. (2011) found out that there was no effect on achievements, and students' studying habits did not change when replacing normal lectures with podcasts.

Both oral and video-podcasts have a positive impact on the learning environment and students' behavior, as students experience podcasts as a good way to catch up the missed lectures and review materials (e.g. Heilesen, 2010;

Kay, 2012). In general, students see podcasts as an effective and pleasant way to learn (e.g. O'Bannon et al., 2011; Kay, 2012). Students tend to like the lengths of podcasts and it highlights the feeling of effectiveness (O'Bannon, 2011). Podcasts allow students to study regardless of time and location, which differs podcasts from traditional lectures. When the learning is not bounded with time or location, students feel more motivated to take advantage of the learning opportunity (e.g. Heilesen, 2010; Kay, 2012). However, O'Bannon et al. (2011) found out that students prefer to listen to podcasts at home in order to learn and focus better.

Despite the positive attitudes towards consuming podcasts as a learning method, podcasts still set up some challenges for both students and teachers. The producers of the podcasts, usually teachers, professors and other experts, often face technological difficulties and they have to use limited resources to learn how to use the podcasting as a learning method (Kay, 2012). O'Bannon also mentions technical difficulties, and they set up challenges for students as well. Accessing and downloading podcasts may be difficult to some students, which affects to their attitudes towards podcasts as a learning method (O'Bannon, 2011).

Another challenge regarding podcasts is that students have less motivation to attend the lectures, thanks to podcasts (Kay, 2012). This may result into just listening to podcasts instead of coming to school. However, O'Bannon argue that some students have difficulties on seeing the relevance of podcasts. Students are distracted easier when they learn through podcasts, instead of traditional lectures, and they are left without an opportunity to ask questions (Foertsch et al., 2002). Another challenge regarding the phenomenon is their unfamiliarity, as not all students have listened to podcasts before (O'Bannon, 2011). Students need to study a new learning method, but after they familiarize themselves with

podcasts, it is experienced as an effective alternative learning tool (e.g. Heilesen, 2010; O'Bannon, 2011).

3 Methodology

In this chapter, I present the research approach and methods for data collection. I used qualitative research and interpretive approach, as the aim was to understand the phenomenon of online content consumption in the context of podcasts. I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews in order to gain sufficient knowledge about millennials' podcast consumption and find repeating themes. I will present the data collection and analysis, besides the background information regarding the interviewees.

3.1. Research approach

This research aims to understand the consumption patterns of online media in the context of podcasts. As an in-depth exploration was needed in order to gain knowledge about the podcast content consumption, I conducted a qualitative research. It allows to examine consumer's experiences in detail and identify meanings behind the experiences (Hennink & Bailey 2020). Thus, qualitative research was chosen to understand the behaviors, motivations and beliefs behind the phenomenon of consuming podcasts.

The research approach was interpretive, as it takes into account the humane actors (Walsham, 2006). The study is based on interviewees' own experiences and aims to find patterns regarding the content consumption habits in the context of podcasts. Thus, shared meanings and social aspects needed to be understood in the research. Interpretive approach allows to better understand the behavior and experiences, as the research design enables to discover the significant findings through the contrast between conversations and experiences (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013).

The interpretive approach allows to take different contexts into account and describe different realities depending on the context (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). It is often used when analyzed human phenomenon. As the study evaluates online content consumption patterns in the context of podcasts, interpretive approach is a suitable approach. Positivist approach would not have been applicable for this research, as humanistic qualitative methods were needed to get a deeper understanding about the consumers' behavior in the online environment (Walsham, 2006). Positivist approach does not suit in this kind of research trying to find meanings based on a certain context.

As Hudson & Ozanne (1988) state, interpretive approach considers the researcher to already have existing knowledge and preunderstanding about the discoursed subject. I had previous knowledge about the content consumption behaviors and the podcasting phenomenon. I also knew the interviewees beforehand, which enabled to choose suitable respondents that tend to both listen to podcasts and consume other online medias. I have been listening to podcasts and consuming content in online medias as well, meaning that I already had my own perceptions about the phenomenon. Despite being open to new knowledge and understanding about the topic, the previous experience regarding the studied phenomenon cannot be totally excluded. However, interpretive approach takes this previous knowledge into account by assuming that the researcher already has information regarding the subject (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

3.2 Data collection

The chosen method to gather data was semi-structured in-depth interviews. As the research approach was qualitative, it was essential to conduct in-depth interviews instead of for example online survey. The questions were prepared

beforehand and were mainly open-ended in order to allow the informants to express themselves freely in their own words. Follow-up questions were asked if needed to gain wider understanding about the topics. Open-ended questions and the feeling of a rather relaxed conversation are typical for in-depth interviews (Hennink & Bailey, 2020).

The interviews were conducted face to face in order to be able to ask the open-ended and follow-up questions. Hudson & Ozanne (1988) also state that interaction is crucial for interpretive research approach, which highlights the importance of conducting the interviews face to face. Eight participants were interviewed for this research, which is a suitable sample size in the chosen qualitative research method, as the recommended number is between 5 to 25 (Kuzel, 1992). The interviews were recorded and later transcribed in order to better analyze the results (Walsham, 2006). When I analyzed the data, repeating key themes emerged. After the data collection and analysis, I evaluated how the results and themes relate to already existing theories.

3.3 Interviewees

List of the participants is provided below (Table 1). All the participants listen to podcasts regularly and use other online media sites daily. The chosen target group for the research was millennials, as they spend over 2,5 hours in online media daily (Global Web Index, 2019). Thus, they are likely to have experienced both consuming podcasts and other online medias on a regular basis. The ages of the respondents varied between 24 to 29. There were three females and five males among the interviewees. The criteria for choosing the participants was that they listen to podcasts regularly and consume other online medias as well. These criteria were fulfilled under each interviewee.

As can be seen from the Table 1, the study included various kinds of podcast listeners: one participant had listened half a year, whereas another had been listening to podcasts over five years. Most of the participants had listened podcasts for about two years. The frequency of listening to podcast varied between daily to weekly listening. Many interviewees managed to tell the exact number of times they listen to podcasts weekly. This was mainly due to the fact that they listen to certain podcasts that publish a new episode once or twice a week.

All the participants use other online medias as well, and the most popular online medias among the respondents were Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, Spotify and LinkedIn. Those were mentioned by all the interviewees. Some also mentioned Jodel, Reddit, Tinder and Snapchat, but they were clearly not as popular as the other platforms.

	Gender	Age	How often listens to podcasts	How long has been listening to podcasts (years)	What other online medias uses
Interviewee 1	Male	27	1-2 times/week	4	IG, Spotify, FB, LI, WhatsApp
Interviewee 2	Male	24	Daily	0,5	IG, Spotify, FB, LI, WhatsApp, Jodel, Snapchat, TikTok, Reddit
Interviewee 3	Male	26	Every other day	2,5	IG, FB, LI, WhatsApp, Spotify, Jodel, Tinder
Interviewee 4	Male	24	Daily	2	IG, FB, LI, WhatsApp, Spotify
Interviewee 5	Female	24	Daily	1	IG, FB, LI, WhatsApp, Spotify, Jodel, TikTok, Snapchat
Interviewee 6	Female	26	Weekly	2	IG, FB, LI, WhatsApp, Spotify, Jodel, Snapchat, Tinder
Interviewee 7	Male	25	5 times/week	5	IG, FB, LI, WhatsApp, Spotify
Interviewee 8	Female	29	2 times/week	2	IG, FB, LI, WhatsApp, Spotify, TikTok, Spotify

Table 1: Background information regarding the interviewees

3.4 Data analysis

The approach for the research was qualitative and interpretive, as it suited best for the study that takes into account the human actors and context. Qualitative research includes numerous different analysis frameworks. To analyze the data in this research, I used a thematic analysis method. The method was chosen due to the nature of the study: it was mainly about respondents' own experiences regarding the consumption of podcasts. Thematic analysis is a method that enables to find interesting patterns regarding the data and reveal the most crucial themes that are repeated in the interviews (King et al., 2019). It is suggested that the themes are identified based on the perceptions, experiences and recurring characteristics that the researcher finds relevant regarding the research question. King et al. (2019) suggest that topics should occur at least twice in order to be identified as a theme.

The analysis in this research consisted of transcribing the interviews, familiarizing with the data and searching the key themes inside the data. As mentioned before, the interviews were conducted face to face. I transcribed each interview right after conducting it. I found it important to first record the interview and then go through it by transcribing the record.

After all interviews were conducted, I went through all of them. After half of the interviews were done, I already recognized some repeating patterns. Since all interviews were finally conducted and transcribed, I reviewed all of them. After a while, I started to form themes that were repeating among the interviewees. Several themes were identified based on the results of the interviews. I evaluated the findings and identified the most important themes. The key themes were later evaluated in the light of previous research.

4 Findings

This chapter presents the findings gained from the qualitative study. I will go through the key themes that emerged from the interviews and evaluate them. Previous literature will be used to understand the results of the study. Thematic analysis was used to find the emerging key themes. I used e.g. Belk's framework of extended self in online environment and Foucault's and McNay's analysis of self-improvement to review and analyze the findings.

My analysis resulted into four three factors that explain the podcast consumption among millennials: the search for self-improvement, effectiveness through dematerialization and podcasts' unique way to combine entertainment and learning. I will go through all the findings and key themes in the next chapters.

4.1 Extended self in podcast consumption

Belk (2013) presented the framework of extended self in online environment. This explains reasons behind the basic patterns of how and why we behave in digital environment. In the first part of this chapter, I will evaluate the key findings in the context of podcast consumption habits among millennials, and review the findings based on Belk's framework of extended self in digital environment.

According to Belk (2013), dematerialization refers to the disappeared need of owning physical objects in order to consume content. This is highly visible in the podcast consumption among millennials. All interviewees mentioned that one of the most important reason behind listening to podcasts is the easiness, as podcasts can be listened whenever and wherever the consumer wants to. The

interviewees were asked to mention five last times they listened podcasts and almost all participants mentioned commuting, cooking or doing sports. Dematerialization enables the podcast consumption despite the place, time or other restrictions. The interviewees did not mention the dematerialization directly, yet all the answers addressed the importance of being able to listen to podcasts at the same time while doing something else.

“The last five times I listened to a podcast were this morning in the metro, last evening while showering (used Bluetooth speaker) and the day before while commuting in the metro. The other times were also commuting or showering. I always do something else, while listening to podcasts.”

As one of the interviewees mentioned, she even showers while listening to podcasts. She stated that she always does something else at the same time, which highlights the dematerialization indirectly: the habit of listening to podcasts while doing something else would not be possible if the interviewee would have needed for example concrete books or other equipment to enjoy the podcast. The activities that were mentioned the most were commuting, doing sports, showering and cooking, as almost everyone mentioned at least one of them. Thus, consumers take podcasts as part of their daily routines.

Belk explained that reembodiment refers to the nature of not necessarily knowing the producer of the content and the possibility to stay anonymous while consuming the content. Based on the interviews, reembodiment is not emphasized when it comes to millennials' podcast consumption habits. Most of the times, names of the podcast hosts are stated already in the titles of the podcasts, and some of the podcasters are well-known celebrities or they became influencers after starting a podcast. Even though consumers know who are the authors of the podcasts, most of the time it is not the main reason for listening

to it. Based on the study, the podcast host should have a clear voice and good argumentation, and especially the quality of the sound should be desirable.

When it comes to the anonymity of podcast listeners themselves, none of the interviewees mentioned it as a reason to listen to podcasts. Each and every podcast listener is anonymous, as there is no possibility to comment the podcast directly or discuss with other listeners in the same platform. The anonymity might be taken for granted and thus was not mentioned in the interviews. However, one of the interviewees mentioned that she sometimes discusses about her favorite podcast in another anonym online forum. Although the interviewees did not mention the anonymity directly, they highlight the fact that they only listen to podcasts that interest them and seldom discuss about podcasts with others. It seems that anonymity is indeed taken for granted.

The third characteristic defining the extended self and our behavior in online media is sharing, according to Belk. Schau (2013) refers to the phenomenon as well, as sharing certain content in online media can be seen as a way to communicate about yourself. In the consumption of podcasts, sharing does not seem to play an important role at a first glance. The interviewees were asked whether they discuss about podcasts with their friends and family, and most of the interviewees began their answers with no, but then added that they talk about podcasts if the topic in the discussion is related to something they have learned from podcast.

Due to the nature of podcasts, they are more difficult to share online than other social media content. Spotify and other platforms do not offer a direct possibility to share the podcast for others and the consumer needs to switch to another social media platform to be able to share the podcast. For example, podcast can be shared on Facebook, but the consumer needs to use two apps or platforms:

both the podcast platform and the social media channel where they wish to share the podcast.

The difficulty of finding a suitable podcast was also mentioned by one of the interviewees:

“It felt very difficult to find interesting podcasts. Suddenly, there were so many podcasts, because podcasting is so much easier way to produce content than for example YouTube. That’s the reason why there are also lots of not-so-good podcasts, and there is no feature of finding a similar one that I listened before. You really have to search in order to find those that interest you.”

The lack of features that would automatically recommend certain podcasts to the listeners, and the lack of sharing options were seen as rather negative among the interviewees. Some interviewees mentioned that they have found new podcasts thanks to discussions with their friends, colleagues or family members, instead of seeing someone sharing it online. They had heard about the podcasts in the middle of different conversations, and the podcast had something to do with the discussed topic.

Even though the interviewees tell that the lack of sharing options is having a negative impact on their listening experience, it might actually have a different kind of influence. As the sharing is difficult, it supports the privacy of podcast listening experience. Consumers do not listen to certain podcasts in order to build some kind of image about themselves but they rather prefer series they truly enjoy. This is strongly linked to the co-construction of self, as in other platforms the co-construction of self might be the key element of even using the platform in the first place.

According to Belk, the co-construction of self is indeed defining our behavior in online environment. This means that consumers use certain online medias, publish photos and share content to construct their extended self (Belk, 2013). In addition to the lack of sharing options, the results from the interviews reveal that podcasts are consumed differently than other online medias. There is a big difference especially compared to other social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. On those channels, other consumers can see who you follow, which pictures you like and who you are friends with. There are no such features at all, when it comes to podcasts. As one of the interviewees mentioned, it makes finding new favorites difficult. However, it allows consumers to listen to just the podcasts they actually like. They do not have to form a certain image of themselves in the eyes of other consumers, as they will never know what kind of podcasts they listened to, unless the consumer makes a decision to reveal it. One interviewee mentioned that podcasts feel more intimate than other online medias, which is related to the nature of podcasts and the lack of opportunities to see which podcasts others listen to.

Only one interviewee mentioned that listening to podcasts fits into his image of himself:

“Maybe if I think about myself, and that I read a lot, listening to podcasts fit into my image. But I don’t think others think about that, as I don’t really talk about podcasts that much with others. Sometimes I might mention something while for example having a lunch, if the topic is somehow related to a certain podcast. Very seldom I start a conversation regarding a podcast.”

The interviewee compares listening to podcasts into reading books and sees that listening to podcasts fits into the image he has about himself. Despite that, he also states that he does not think that others care whether he listens to podcasts or not. He barely discusses about podcasts or the listening habits with others,

which explains his way of thinking. One explaining factor for not talking about podcasts is again the rather private aspect. He consumes podcasts only when he is alone and his primary motivation is to learn new things while for example exercising, and thus feel more effective. He also mentions that listening to podcasts feels more intimate than consuming other online medias, as he is listening for almost an hour for just one or few people talking. The feeling of intimacy and privacy seems to be another explanatory factor for the lack of discussion regarding podcasts in the daily life, especially compared to other online medias.

Even though consumers do not see which podcasts others are listening to, many of the interviewees listened mostly podcasts that benefit themselves somehow: either they learned things that can be used at work or they were entertained – or both. The process of choosing which podcast to listen seem to be more honest than in other online medias, as the co-construction of self happens through the actual learning through the content instead of for example choosing to follow certain popular podcasts because it forms a desired image of the consumer. Even the entertaining podcasts are chosen based on what actually entertains the consumer, instead of what is fashionable to listen to. If a podcast becomes popular, the content must be enjoyable, interesting, educational or bring something totally new to the listener. The findings regarding entertainment will be discussed in the latter part.

The lack of functionalities, that are kept normal on other online media platforms, such as sharing or seeing what others are doing, seem to make podcasts more private compared to other online medias. The interviewees tell that they do not talk about podcasts with others much, unless the topic of the discussion concerns something they have learned through podcasts. As other consumers cannot see which podcasts others follow, it seems to strengthen the feeling of podcasts being more private than other online medias. One participant

tells that she mainly listens to crime podcasts, but on YouTube she watches videos from beauty gurus and influencers. She mentions that she cannot listen to beauty-related podcasts as the visual side is missing, yet the privacy is another explaining factor. She describes that she chooses only podcasts that truly interest her, and other interviewees tell the same. It seems that consumers are very exact on what kind of content they want from podcasts: it needs to suit their needs and be interesting, otherwise they will quit the episode and pick something else. As the co-construction of self defines consumers' behavior in content consumption online, it seems not to explain the consumption of podcasts as much due to the more private aspect.

The last element defining our behavior in online environment (Belk, 2013) is distributed memory. Belk explains that distributed memory refers to the same phenomena in online environment, that happens when we remember things through physical objects, such as souvenirs. None of the interviewees mentioned that they would associate certain memories into podcasts, even though everyone told that they listen podcasts while doing other things, such as cooking or commuting. Nevertheless, podcasts are still a rather new online media, which may have an impact on the results. Interviewees mainly referred to the daily tasks, when they mentioned what they are usually doing at the same time while consuming podcasts. Thus, podcasts seem not to play an important role when it comes to remembering or creating new memories.

Even though Belk's theory of digital extended self explains consumers' behavior in other online medias, it seems that the extended self is not among the factors explaining podcast consumption habits among millennials. There are similarities, such as dematerialization, but the nature of podcasts seems to be different than other online medias. The lack of sharing and following others enables podcasts to differentiate from other medias, as podcasts remain rather private and intimate.

4.2. Podcasts: a way of self-improvement

As self-improvement was another theme that was clearly highlighted from the interviews, the next chapter will discuss about podcast consumption as a way of self-improvement in detail.

In the literature review, I opened up Foucault's and McNay's analysis of individuals considering themselves as enterprises that result into self-improvement. I assumed that self-improvement will be highlighted from the interviews, as podcasts have been used as a teaching method before they reached their popularity as a way to produce and consume content.

Self-improvement as a motive to listen to podcasts was a clearly emerging theme in the interviews. Almost all the interviewees discussed about self-improvement, and it was mentioned directly as a key motive to listen to podcasts.

“To me, the biggest learning from podcasts is that everything can be learned. That's a thing I didn't realize before, but learned after I started to listen to podcasts.”

One interviewee even mentions that he learned the importance of learning through podcasts. The nature of podcasts might explain this phenomenon, as they are usually made in a rather entertaining way and the producers take into account that listeners are not experts, so the ideas and theories are explained in a simple way.

One participant also mentions that learning is the key driver for him to recommend podcasts to others and try to get his friends and family to start listening to podcasts:

“When you listen to a certain podcast, you can become a self-made expert on that topic. For example, I have tried to make my sister to start listening to Rahapodi (Money Podcast) in order to make her to better understand money, investing and all those things.”

The interviewee keeps podcasts as a handy way of becoming an expert of a certain topic. He also encourages his sister to become an expert, in the rather same way that entrepreneur could encourage his co-workers. It is clear, that the participant keeps self-improvement important and it is among the key factors for him to listen to podcasts, even though he mentioned that he listens to entertaining podcasts as well. Foucault’s and McNay’s analysis of individuals considering themselves as enterprises explain the results, as the interviewee mentions the desire to develop himself and become an expert.

Another interviewee highlights podcast’s nature of offering new perspectives and being different compared to other online medias:

“Podcasts often give me new perspectives and other social media platforms seldom do this. Social media is more based on what your friends do and other things like that, whereas podcasts are more based on facts and knowledge, which makes them interesting to me. For example, I have been listening a lot to Ideacast, a podcast with changing themes. One episode can be for example 20 minutes of how to have better meetings at work and 20 minutes of how to set good goals for next year, and so on.”

He is clearly on the same page with other interviewees: self-improvement is among the key factors that affect his podcast consumption. He values podcasts that are based on knowledge to be able to learn from them. He also compares podcasts to other online medias and finds them more knowledge-based and

educational. He consumes other online medias to keep updated on what is going on with his friends, whereas he listens to podcasts to learn new things. The example that he mentioned refers to both work-life and free time, which indicates that he wishes to use the learnings in both at work and home.

Based on the results, the search of self-improvement is among the key factors explaining podcast consumption among millennials. Foucault's theory and McNay's analysis present that individuals keep themselves as enterprises, which motivates for self-improvement. Consumers are searching for deeper meanings through online medias, and podcasts offer a way to learn new things. Self-improvement was directly mentioned by most of the interviewees, but considering themselves as enterprises was not. However, it can be indirectly inferred from the responses and the nature of how they discuss about self-improvement in both at work and free time.

4.3. Podcasts: a way to be more efficient

Effectiveness was another clearly emerging theme in the interviews, as all the participants discussed about it. All the interviewees told that they listen to podcasts while commuting, and many consume them also when cooking, doing sports or even while showering. Interviewees mentioned that they used to listen to music while doing these daily tasks, but now they are listening to podcasts. Most of the interviewees explained that the shift has made them feel more effective, as they can learn new things and be entertained while for example cooking or commuting.

“If I clean and learn new things from podcasts at the same time, I feel more effective indeed.”

“I started to listen to podcasts while I started to go running more often. I didn’t want to just listen to music, as I wanted to use the time more effectively. That’s why I started to listen podcasts and kept listening to them also when commuting. I feel that the effective use of time is clearly the main reason to listen to podcasts.”

The effective use of time is linked to the self-improvement, as learning new things while doing daily tasks is considered as effective use of time. One interviewee tells that she prefers watching YouTube videos while at home, because they require a lot of focusing due to the video format. Whereas, podcasts can be easily listened while commuting or cleaning, as one does not need to watch something at the same time. Thus, effectiveness is also linked to the dematerialization. Podcasts work perfectly by just listening to them with any mobile device, so it leaves hands and eyes completely free and allows consumers to do whatever they wish at the same time. As effectiveness refers mainly to the ability to do other things while listening to podcasts, it goes hand in hand with the dematerialization.

As the effectiveness was discussed by all the interviewees, it is clear that it is among the key factors affecting to the podcast consumption. Effective use of time also links to the self-improvement, as learning new things while doing something else at the same time was seen as an effective use of time by the interviewees. The feeling of being entertained while learning new things will be opened up in the next chapter.

4.4. Podcasts: a way to be entertained

Another key emerging theme from the interviews was entertainment, as it was widely discussed by almost all the participants. One participant was focused

just on the self-improvement and did not mention anything about the entertainment. All the podcasts he listened were educational and as he clearly enjoys listening to them. Thus, he also seems to consider learning new things to be entertaining, even though he did not directly mention it and instead highlights the importance of learning. However, the rest of the interviewees kept entertainment as an important factor when it comes to the podcast listening experience.

“I like entertaining podcasts. I prefer especially podcasts about criminals, conspiracy theories and murders. The most important reason for listening to them is entertainment, but at the same time I can learn new things. I have learned a lot about the history of United States, for example.”

To some of the interviewees, entertainment was the main reason for listening to podcasts. Self-improvement and learning feels like coming as a bonus, but it is indeed part of the feeling of being entertained. The same participant compares listening to music and podcasts:

“Podcasts have improved the quality of my life, as now I have more meaningful things to listen, while for example going to work. It feels like I’m bored to music and I can’t find new songs I would like to listen. Podcasts help in this, as I don’t have to stress about what to listen. I know that at least twice a week I have something good to listen while commuting, as my favourite podcasts release new episodes on Tuesdays and Fridays.”

She clearly finds podcasts as a more stress-free way to entertain herself, as she does not need to make any decisions, while the podcast producers just release new episodes and she can trust that it fulfills her entertainment needs. She even states that podcasts make her life more meaningful, as she does not need to be as bored as she was before. This is also linked to the effectiveness, as she most

likely feels to be more effective when listening to a podcast instead of music. Even though podcasts sometimes remind more like live content, as the consumer cannot decide when the episode will be published, it seems that podcasts can be embedded into the regular life rhythm. It resembles TV-episodes: consumers cannot decide when the episode is played, but over time consumers are willing to create routines and watch the episode e.g. every Friday night at 9 pm. Each podcast episode is completely new, the same way as the episodes in TV-shows, so consumers are looking forward into listening the episodes, whereas they get bored listening the same music playlists all over again.

Entertainment is a rather subjective issue, yet it can be inferred from the interviews that podcasts break the traditional boundaries between entertainment and learning. That is something that most of the millennial consumers are looking for, as they wish to fulfill their entertainment needs. As Vorderer & Reinecke (2015) found out, consumers are nowadays looking for deeper meanings when consuming content online. Podcasts are a way to find these, especially if learning new is part of what the consumer is looking for when searching the meanings through online content. The study showed that learning combined into entertainment is something that most millennials are looking for. Foucault's and McNay's (2009) theory of individuals considering themselves as enterprises support these findings, as the same mindset clearly applies to millennials and their podcast consumption habits. As I mentioned before, learning is also linked to the feeling of effectiveness, as it makes consumers feel that they accomplish something meaningful while doing basic daily tasks.

According to the study, the way how podcasts combine entertainment and learning is the key factor that differentiates podcasts from other online platforms. Other online medias, such as YouTube, allow the learning to some extent as well, yet it does not focus on that the same way as podcasts do. It seems that consumers choose podcasts over other online medias when they wish to

learn and be entertained at the same time, yet they want to do it regardless of time and place.

Another clearly emerging factor regarding whether the participants felt entertained or not was the quality of podcasts. They easily quit listening to podcasts that did not meet their quality requirements or those whose hosts' voices did not please them:

“Technical issues are extremely important when you listen to someone's voice for a long time. I don't like live shows due to the bad quality of the sounds, no matter if it's my favorite podcast - I never listen the live shows. If the quality is bad, it's like listening to a broken radio, I just can't do it.”

As one of the interviewees described, she cannot listen to a bad-quality podcasts at all, no matter who the host is. One interviewee also mentioned that he cannot listen to certain Ted Talks, as the accents are too difficult to understand. He is very interested in the topics and people behind the Ted Talks, but as he would need to extremely concentrate on listening to those podcasts in order to understand everything, he does not want to listen to them. Instead, he wants to be able to do other things at the same time while listening to podcasts. Thus, the mental efficiency is not fulfilled, if the listener is forced to pay constant attention to the podcast due to the bad quality of it. As millennials want to do something else while listening to podcasts, bad-quality podcasts do not fulfill their needs. Despite the interesting topics, they are not ready to pay active attention during the whole podcast. Thus, they rather choose another podcast with better quality.

The study shows that entertainment is among the key factors affecting podcast consumption habits. Consumers are searching for entertainment that fulfill their needs, yet e.g. music is often considered just purely entertaining, whereas

podcasts break the boundaries between entertainment and learning. Consumers are seeking deeper meanings when they consume content, which makes podcasts a desirable choice instead of other online medias. However, to be entertained through podcasts, certain quality requirements need to be fulfilled. The requirements are personal and set by each consumer themselves.

5 Discussion

There has been a lot of research regarding the online content consumption in general, yet the context of podcasts is still lacking research. Due to the growing popularity of podcasts and the enormous number of consumers listening to them, it is important to get a broader understanding of the phenomenon. This study was conducted in order to fill the clear research gap regarding the podcast consumption. Several implications for research were found through the study: podcasts break the traditional boundaries between entertainment and learning, and thus allow consumers to feel effective and entertained at the same time. Consumers are searching for self-improvement, which is among the key factors explaining why millennials enjoy listening to podcasts. The lack of sharing options has shaped podcasts into more intimate and private platform than e.g. other social media channels. These findings will be discussed in detail in this chapter. Limitations of this study will also be evaluated. The chapter will end with some recommendations for the future research.

5.1 Implications for research

As has been mentioned before, content consumption in the context of podcasts lacks a wider previous research. Thus, there is a clear gap in the literature and research to be filled. This research focused on finding the main factors that explain the podcast consumption among the chosen target group, millennials. Several key findings emerged to extend the previous research.

When it comes to the content consumption in general, it has been researched through consumers' behavior in online environment. Goffman (1978) found out the presentation of self, that was later linked to the way we act on social media and what kind of content we decide to consume in online medias. Belk (2013)

extends Goffman's findings by presenting the digital extended self, that explains consumers' behavior in online medias. He found out characteristics affecting to the content consumption online: dematerialization, reembodiment, sharing, distributed memory and co-construction of self. In this research, these characteristics were evaluated in the context of podcasts. The dematerialization was highlighted in the context of podcasts, as consumers do not need any special products to consume podcasts. Whereas the other characteristics seem not to define the podcast consumption among millennials, a rather surprising finding was made: the lack and difficulty of sharing options plays a big role when it comes to the nature of content consumption. Sharing was also among Kietzmann's (2011) functional blocks of social media. Millennials are used to see who others are following on social media and interpret on what kind of persons others are based on their social media profiles, but this does not apply to the podcast consumption. Due to the absence of this phenomenon, podcasts are kept as rather private and intimate.

As consumers do not see which podcasts other consumers listen to, they have high standards on what kind of content they choose to consume. They do not need to form a certain kind of image of themselves by listening to specific podcasts, as other do not see the podcasts they listen to. Thus, they choose to listen to just the podcasts they enjoy. Consumers, especially millennials, are searching for a meaning rather than just good feeling or pleasure, when consuming content online (Vorderer & Reinecke 2015). The search for deeper meanings was certainly highlighted in the research. The study shows that podcasts are a popular way for millennial consumers to fulfill these needs.

Based on my findings, podcasts combine entertainment and learning in a completely new way. McNay (2009) analysed individuals considering themselves as enterprises, which motivates into self-improvement. This explains consumers' desire to consume content that both entertains and is

educational. Podcasts enable this in a way that differentiates them from other online platforms. Through the self-improvement, consumers also get a feeling of effectiveness: they can do their daily tasks, such as cleaning, while learning new things through podcasts. This is also linked to the dematerialization, as podcasts do not require anything else except a mobile device. Indeed, the search for self-improvement and the feeling of effectiveness are key factors affecting millennials' podcast consumption.

Podcasts were previously researched in the context of learning environment. The studies have had contradictory results whether podcasts have positive impacts on the educational results, yet students' attitudes towards this new learning method have been mainly positive (e.g. Cebeci & Tekdal, 2006; Heilesen, 2010; Kay, 2012; Richardson, 2016). This research extends the previous studies, as podcast consumers highlight the importance of the learning aspect also in their free time. Thus, the attitudes among millennial podcast consumers are positive in both learning environments and free time.

To sum it up, three important factors affecting podcast consumption among millennials were found:

1) Millennial consumers are searching for self-improvement, and podcasts combine learning into entertainment in a new, engaging way. 2) Millennials aim to be efficient, and podcasts enable this goal. 3) The lack of sharing options and other functionalities allow podcasts to remain intimate and honest platform, where consumers can focus on content they truly enjoy without the stress of presenting themselves in a certain light.

The lack of sharing options and similar functionalities as other online medias have shape the nature of podcast consumption and makes it more intimate platform than other online medias, such as social media channels. The search

for self-improvement and the feeling of effectiveness are having a big impact on podcast consumption, as millennials want to feel effective by learning new. Podcasts allow consumers to do other things while still enjoying the content, which enables the feeling of efficacy. Self-improvement needs to be possible in an entertaining way, and podcasts need to fulfill consumers' standards. The way how podcasts combine entertainment and learning is among the key factors that differentiate podcasts from other online platforms.

5.2 Limitations and future research

There are some limitations related to the study. As the target group of the study was millennials, the respondents were between the age of 24 to 29 and they were interviewed face-to-face. In order to understand the topic even wider and get a better generalization, the study should be conducted in different age groups and to a larger amount of online content consumers instead of just millennials.

As podcasts are still a rather new way to consume content, there is not a lot of previous research regarding it. I used theories concerning consumers' behavior in online environment in general to evaluate how the consumption of podcasts differentiate from content consumption in other online medias. In the future research, the topic could also be evaluated from the behalf of the podcast producers. As this study showed, consumers have high expectations regarding the quality of podcasts, as they do not feel entertained if the podcast does not meet their requirements. It would be intriguing to know, what are the most common criterion regarding podcasts, and how content producers take those into account. The production patterns are something that completely lacks the research. The motives for producing podcasts could also be evaluated and compared into the motives of producing content in other online platforms.

This study was conducted to the millennials who listen to podcasts. Therefore, the point of view was based on those who already consider podcasts as a desirable platform and the opinions of non-listeners were not taken into account. Thus, it would be beneficial to also investigate the aspects of those who do not listen to podcasts: what are the reasons that prevent them from choosing podcasts over other online medias and what would make them to change their opinions and start listening to podcasts.

Another interesting angle that is still missing research is how brands are using podcasts in their marketing and what kind of branded content succeed in the world of podcasts. As many podcast producers offer opportunities to place advertisement in their podcast episodes, it would be interesting to compare the effect of brand's own podcasts and branded content into advertisement they place in other producers' podcasts. Branded content could be also evaluated in the light of the success in other online medias: how consumers react to marketing in podcasts versus marketing in other online platforms.

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